DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 828 JC 790 100

TITLE Criteria for Establishing and Maintaining State-Supported Community Junior Colleges in Colorado.
INSTITUTION Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, Denver.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Board of Education Policy; Community Colleges; *Declining Enrollment; Educational Objectives; Enrollment Trends; Financial Problems; Financial Support; Full State Funding; *Junior Colleges; Rural Schools; *Small Colleges; State Legislation; *Statewide Planning; Student Recruitment; Tuition
IDENTIFIERS *Colorado

ABSTRACT

Following an overview of the growth of publicly supported junior colleges in Colorado and corresponding state legislation and policies of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, this paper presents the present position of the Board on issues of student access and the establishment and maintenance of community colleges. Their long-term goal is that every Colorado resident above the age of 16, not currently in high school, should have access to a comprehensive community college within thirty minutes from his residence. However, a number of state-level decisions have contributed to a reduction in enrollment among some rural community colleges; these include the establishment of seven community colleges, increases in tuition, statutory limitations on local district funding increases, and curtailment of state participation in local capital construction. Enrollment declines at rural colleges, caused by new urban colleges, tuition surcharges, and elimination of state support for intercollegiate athletic programs, have been offset in some cases by the development of new and unique programs. The State Board supports the following ideas to increase student access and enrollment: reducing or eliminating in-state tuition at rural institutions, limiting numbers of high school students at doctoral-granting institutions, and reducing student-faculty ratios at small colleges with increases in state support. (MB)

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CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING STATE-SUPPORTED COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGES IN COLORADO

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Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education

CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING STATE-SUPPORTED COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGES IN COLORADO

Appropriate criteria for establishing new community junior colleges and maintaining existing community junior colleges are necessarily closely related to the views of the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education concerning student access.

The Colorado General Assembly expressed its general intent in C.R.S. 1973, 23-1-103: "The purposes of this article are to make opportunities for post high school education as available as possible in Colorado . . ."

In the Community Colleges and Occupational Education Act of 1967, C.R.S. 1973, 23-60-102, the General Assembly prescribed " . . . a system of two-year colleges conducting occupation, technical, and community service programs, with no term limitations, and general education, including college transfer programs, with unrestricted admission . . ."

Historical Overview

In the fall of 1941, the three publicly supported junior colleges in Colorado enrolled a total of 1,140 students, as compared with a total state college and university enrollment of 9,134. Individual junior college enrollments for that fall term were 528 at Mesa Junior College, 404 at Pueblo Junior College and 208 at Trinidad State Junior College. In 1950, with three additional junior colleges, fall junior college enrollments had increased by 1,270 students from 1949 levels, to a total of 2,410. In the latter year, Northeastern enrolled 108 students, Otero had a total of 116 students, and 78 students enrolled at Lamar.[1] By the fall of 1958, the number of publicly supported junior colleges had grown to six, and total enrollment had increased to 3,949. State college and university enrollment had increased to 23,930. In the

period from 1940 to 1958, Colorado resident enrollment in Colorado colleges and universities increased from 10.8 per 1,000 population to 14.1 per 1,000 population.[2]

In December of 1962, the Association of State Institutions of Higher Education in Colorado stated, "In Colorado a principal need is for the state to assume a larger fiscal responsibility for making lower division college programs and the terminal-technical offerings as readily available geographically as potential student population economically permits."[3]

In 1964, the Committee on Education Beyond High School reported to the Colorado General Assembly. That report called for an increase in first-time freshmen from 5,386 in 1955 to 19,937 in 1975, with corresponding ratios of freshmen to high school graduates increasing from 43.1 percent in 1955 to 49.0 percent in 1975. (The number of high school graduates was projected to increase from 12,494 in 1954-55 to 40,638 in 1974-75).[4] The number of junior college first-time freshmen was projected to rise from 683 and 5.5 percent of the total in 1955 to 3,957 and 9.7 percent of the total in 1975.[5]

The Association of State Institutions of Higher Education in Colorado in 1964, with the explicit involvement of the endorsement by the Legislative Committee on Education Beyond High School, specified the following purposes for two-year community or junior colleges:

1. Provide training in a variety of vocational-technical and professional areas requiring two years or less of post high school education.
2. Provide the first two years of college work for students living at nome so that they are spared up to two years of expense of campus campus residence.
3. Provide an opportunity for students to "try out" a college program even though their academic achievements in high school were not acceptable for admission to a four-year college or university.
4. React swiftly to community needs in many areas of education not only in vocational-technical education but also incontinuing education and re-training.6

The 1964 report stated that 12.3 percent of the total enrollment in Colorado public colleges and universities occurred in the junior colleges in 1954. Because two junior colleges had become baccalaureate-degree-granting institutions, the corresponding figure for 1964 dropped to 8.3 percent.[7] Much of the enrollment growth which had taken place in the rural junior colleges were reported to " . . . have been drawn from the urbanized counties of the state. In 1963, there were 1,656 Colorado first-time-entering freshmen enrolled in the junior colleges. Six hundred and fifteen, or more than 37 percent, came from eight counties of eastern Colorado, none of which has a junior college within commuting distance."[8]

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education made a similar observation in its 1966 report:

> In 1965, 63.8 percent of junior college students in Colorado came from outside the surrounding district of the college they attended; as small a proportion as one in five came from the home district, and in no case (in 1965) did as much as half the student body reside in the home district. The institutions are state-wide rather than local in their appeal to students."[9]

The Commission emphasized two reasons for recommending that a system of state-owned community colleges be established:

1. The economic and social development of this State is dependent upon such action. Industry will locate where needed manpower can be made available . . . . . .

2. The size and scope of enrollment pressures for education beyond high school mean continually increasing public demand and costs . . .. There remain thousands of young people who do not have access to post-high school training and thousands more who drop out of high school or college, for whom community junior college occupational programs will provide needed training.[10]

Various states and professional associations have proposed that new community colleges be established with minimum potential enrollments ranging from 500 FTE upward to 2,000 or more in large metropolitan areas, but those

same states and organizations (e.g., California, Texas, Carnegie Commission on Higher Education) frequently make exceptions for sparsely populated areas.[11] In 1961, the Colorado General Assembly suggested a minimum number of 400 students for public junior colleges.[12] In actual practice, 215 out of a total of 1,023 public two-year institution U.S. campuses listed in the 1977 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, or approximately 20 percent, enrolled fewer than 1,000 total headcount students in the most recent fall term for which enrollment data were available.[13] Numbers of annual FTE students would in most cases be smaller than total fall headcount.

Position of the State Board

The State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education agrees with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in its 1966 contention that:

> " . . . a fundamental principle of organization in American education is one of comprehensiveness of service to particular age groups. The elementary school, the high school, the community college, the college and university thrive on a breadth of purpose and of service. With few exceptions, the single-purpose institution in America has not flourished, as examples in music, art, business, medicine, technical education, and engineering attest. In a broad program in community and techn ical colleges the individual student has the opportunity to discover interests and talents in areas of knowledge or vocation that may be far removed from the presumed interests which led him to the school in the first instance."[14]

As a long-term goal, every Colorado resident above the age of 16 who is not currently enrolled in high school should have access to a comprehensive community college within thirty minutes of traveling time from his place of residence. It should be recognized that the thirty-minute commuting time has implications for urban as well as rural areas. The State Board recognizes that this is not an immediately attainable goal, as, for example, in the case of southwestern Colorado. The possibility exists that one or more of the area vocational schools with substantial postsecondary enrollments may need to be

converted to either local district or state system community colleges as an economically feasible means toward attainment of this goal.

A number of state-level decisions have contributed to reductions in actual or potential enrollments among some rural community junior colleges in Colorado. Examples include the enactment of the 1967 Community Colleges and Occupational Education Act, with the subsequent establishment of or conversion to seven state system community colleges; increases in in-state and out-of-state tuition up to more than 100 percent from 1967-68 rates;[15] statutory limitations on local district funding increases; and curtailment of state participation in local district college capital construction projects.

To illustrate the impact of urban institutions on rural community college enrollments, in 1965 a total of 492 students from Adams, Arapahoe, El Paso, Jefferson, and Denver counties were enrolled at Northeastern Junior College. By 1970, with the intervening opening of the Community College of Denver, Araphoe Community College, and El Paso Community College, the enrollment at Northeastern Junior College from the same five counties had dropped to 279. By the fall of 1977, when the newer community colleges had obtained greater recognition and programmatic maturity, the five-county total enrollment at Northeastern Junior College had declined still further, to 162 students. Thus, over a twelve-year period, Northeastern Junior College lost 330 students from those five metropolitan counties.[16]

Within the same twelve-year period, Lamar Community College's enrollments from the Denver and Colorado Springs areas declined from 56 to 20 students. Lamar Community College has partly compensated for this and other enrollment losses by adding a horse training and management program. Of a total headcount of 471 students in the fall of 1977, 92 are enrolled in the horse training and mangement program.[17] This represents a strong return to institutional vitality, with total headcount enrollment now above the 1967-68 level.

Trinidad State Junior College experienced a similar decline in Denver and El Paso County resident enrollments, with total headcount enrollments from those areas dropping from 143 in 1965 to 33 in the fall of 1977. Trinidad's out-of-state enrollment has also been reduced from 351 in 1965, when out-of-state tuition was $120 per year, to 294 in the fall of 1977, when out-of-state tuition had increased to $1,221 per year.

Trinidad State Junior College built dormitories to house 420 students during the 1950's and early 1960's. The decline in both in-state and out-of-state enrollments resulting from state-level decisions to establish new metropolitan area community colleges and greatly increased out-of-state tuition have adversely affected that college's ability to operate the dormitories on a self-sustaining basis. The elimination of state support for intercollegiate athletic programs is also considered a factor in the college's inability to retire the bonded indebtedness on its dormitories without state financial support.[19] Similar and even more severe problems exist at Otero Junior College and Lamar Community College. Both must continue to receive state appropriations to avoid default on bonded indebtedness.

Still another adverse factor affecting both total enrollment and dormitory use is the tuition surcharge for students enrolled for more than 18 credits per quarter. College officials suggest the need to eliminate the surcharge, which does not apply to area vocational schools, to enable students in such programs as nursing, cosmetology and welding, which require enrollment for more than 18 credit hours per quarter, to graduate on schedule.[20]

Like Lamar Community College, Trinidad State Junior College has aggressively sought to offset enrollment declines by developing unique programs. At Trinidad, there are now unique programs in gunsmithing, music, musical instrument repair and sales, and soil conservation. Trinidad has also provided in-service training in mining technology for more than 500 coal miners during the past twelve months.[21]

At Otero Junior College, peak enrollments of 959 headcount and 619 FTE students occurred in 1967-68. In that year, 42 El Paso County residents and 52 Denver County residents were enrolled. With the opening and maturation of new community colleges since 1967, total enrollment has declined gradually to 851 headcount and 550 FTE in the fall of 1977. El Paso County enrollment has dropped to 15 and Denver County enrollment to 10 for a combined reduction of 69 students from those counties between 1967 and 1977.[22] Enrollment by students in other Denver area counties have doubtless declined accordingly.

Between 1961 and 1963, as a result of an agreement with the Joint Budget Committee that Otero Junior College would eliminate intercollegiate athletics when it became a state community college, Otero lost an estimated 75 students. For eight years, Otero had a $100,000 per year federal Title III grant to offer a (remedial) directed studies program. When the federal grant expired at the end of the 1976-77 fiscal year, staff reductions were required down to a level of four instrutors from the earlier high of seven. Many of those former directed studies students completed the GED high school equivalency test, and some later continued their studies at Otero in academic or occupational fields.[23]

The Veterans Administration has recently awarded a $547,000 grant to Otero Junior College to establish an associate degree program in nursing. The grant is for a five-year period, and, as in the case of the guided studies program, state appropriations will be needed to replace phased-out federal funds to assure continued program operation and/or viability.[24]

For the foregoing reasons, and for the additional reason that stabilization of or even moderate growth in population is considered desirable in rural Colorado areas, the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational

Education reaffirms its long-standing commitment to the preservation and continued vitality of all small community colleges in the state. The State Board and its staff will vigorously pursue all reasonable means to increase enrollment and correspondingly achieve economies of scale. In addition to all state-level and local efforts, however, access and equality of educational opportunity for rural and, in some areas, urban Colorado residents will call for increased state financial support per student as well as in total.

Several additional ideas deserve consideration as means to increase studnet access and enrollment and thereby improve program quality and possibly reduce cost per student at small rural community colleges. One is to substantially reduce or totally eliminate in-state tuition at rural institutions.

A second possibility is to adopt a California-style system of admissions to all public postsecondary institutions, whereby only a small percentage of high school seniors would be admitted to doctoral granting institutions (e.g., 10 to 12 percent based on rank in class and standardized tests). A somewhat larger percentage (perhaps 30 to 50 percent) would be admitted to other senior colleges and universities, while community colleges retain their open-door admissions characteristics.

The local district community colleges have several unique problems which could be alleviated by exempting them from the seven percent maximum increase annually in local tax funds and eliminating the legal ceiling on assessed valuation of property. Such changes would benefit the community colleges in districts which are growing rapidly and currently have assessed valuations at approximately the $500 million level.

Reduction in student-faculty ratios at small state community colleges and increases in state support per FTE student at small local district

community colleges would contribute positively to the ends of increasing access and improving program quality.

With regard to the establishment of any potential new community college, the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education will require assessments of local needs for postsecondary education in the area(s) to be served. Specific requirements for such needs assessments will be developed by the end of the 1978 calendar year. Such requirements may include surveys of the educational and career plans of high school students, surveys of business and industry needs for employees with up to two years of post-secondary education, and rates of postsecondary enrollment.

FOOTNOTES

1. Data on Student Enrollment in All Colleges in Colorado, 1958-59 and Prior Years. Colorado State Planning Division, February, 1969, p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 10.

3. Program for the General Differentiation and Coordination of Functions Among the State-Supported Institutions in Colorado, 1963-1970. Association of State Institutions of Higher Education in Colorado, Denver, December, 1962, p. 2.

4. Education Beyond High School. Report to the Colorado General Assembly. Enrollment Projection Manual (Revised). Committee on Education Beyond High School, Denver, December, 1964, p. 3.

5. Ibid., p. 6.

6. A Program for the Development and Coordination of Higher Education in Colorado, 1964-1970. Association of State Institutions of Higher Education in Colorado, Denver, December, 1964, p. 19.

7. Ibid., p. 21.

8. Ibid., p. 22.

9. Strengthening Higher Education in Colorado. Colorado Commission on Higher Education, Denver, November, 1966, p. 34.

10. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

11. Planning for the '70's: Higher Education in Colorado. Colorado Commission on Higher Education, p. 19.

12. Education Beyond High School. Report to the Colorado General Assembly. Committee Study No. 2. The Legislative Committee for Education Beyond High School, Denver, January, 1961, pp. xxi-xxii.

13. 1977 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory. American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Washington, D. C., 1977, pp. 10-96.

14. Strengthening Higher Education in Colorado, op. cit., p. 41.

15. Colorado Master Plan for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. Prepared by Management and Economics Research Incorporated for the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, Denver, February, 1968, p. 50.

16. Information received from Mr. Ervin S. French, President, Northeastern Junior College, November 18, 1977.

17. Letter from Dr. Billie L. Henderson, Vice President, Lamar Community College, November 21, 1977.

18. Letter from Dr. Thomas Sullivan, President, Trinidad State Junior College, November 22, 1977.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Letter from Dr. William L. McDivitt, President, Otero Junior College, November 18. 1977.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

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